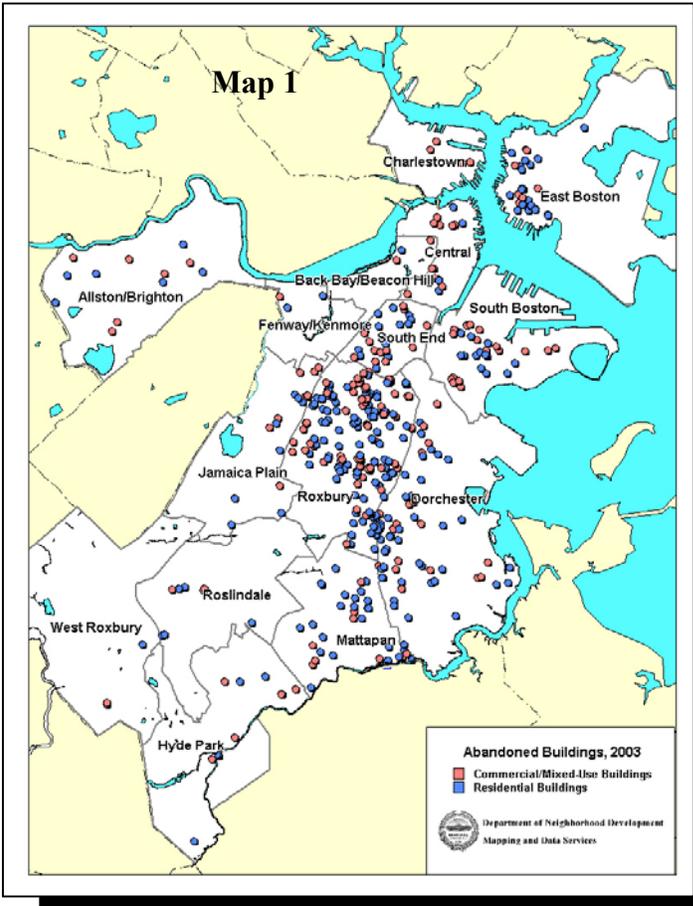




# Abandoned Building TRENDS

Annual Report 2003

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## Survey Highlights

The number of abandoned buildings continues a long-term downward trend, though there has been an increase in the number of abandoned commercial properties in the last two years.

Since the survey began in 1997:

- The total number of abandoned buildings has decreased 57%.
- The number of residential abandoned buildings has decreased 67%.
- The number of commercial and mixed-use abandoned buildings has decreased 26%, but if mixed-use buildings are excluded, the decrease has only been 17%.

Since the initiation of *Leading the Way\** in 2000:

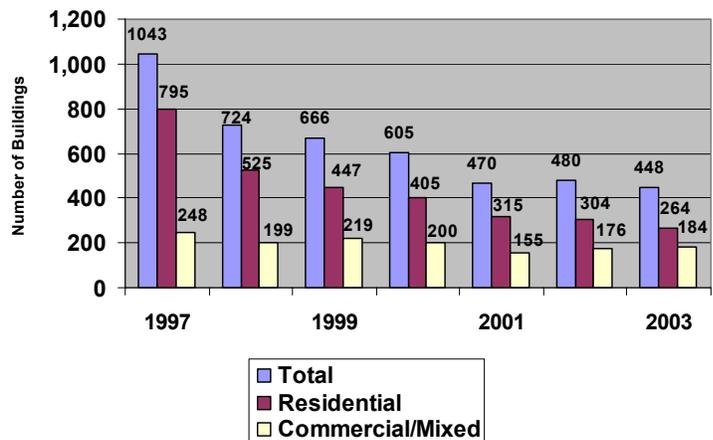
- The total number of abandoned buildings has decreased 26%.
- The number of residential abandoned buildings has decreased 35%.
- The number of commercial and mixed-use abandoned buildings has decreased 8%. If mixed-use buildings are excluded from the total, the decrease has only been 1%.

## Defining “Abandoned”

An abandoned building is defined as any residential, commercial, industrial or mixed-use building (excludes sheds and garages on residential property) which is not occupied and has visible signs of physical distress (i.e., boarded, burned, open to the elements, otherwise deteriorated, etc.).

\**Leading the Way* was the three year (2000 – 2003) City of Boston initiative to create and preserve affordable housing. See [www.cityofboston.gov/dnd](http://www.cityofboston.gov/dnd).

**Chart 1: Abandoned Buildings, by Property Type**

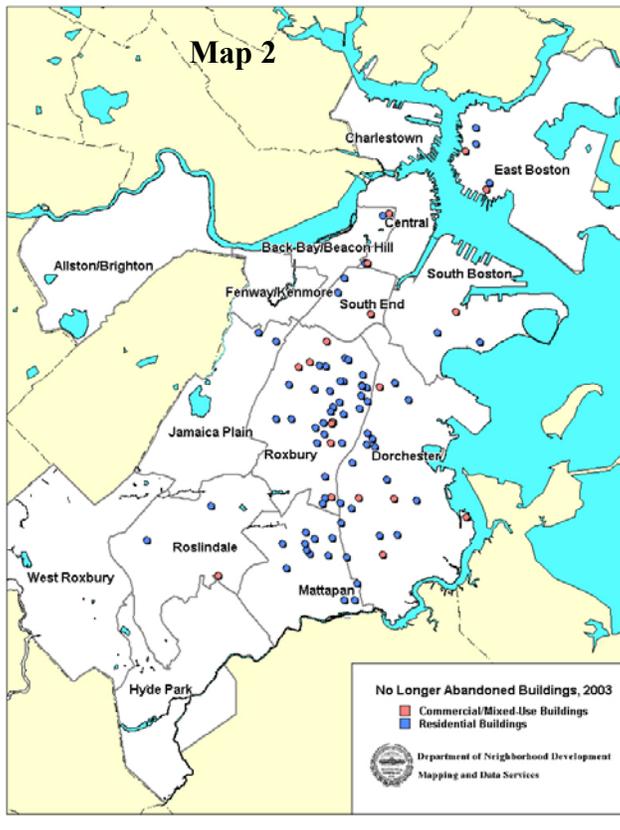




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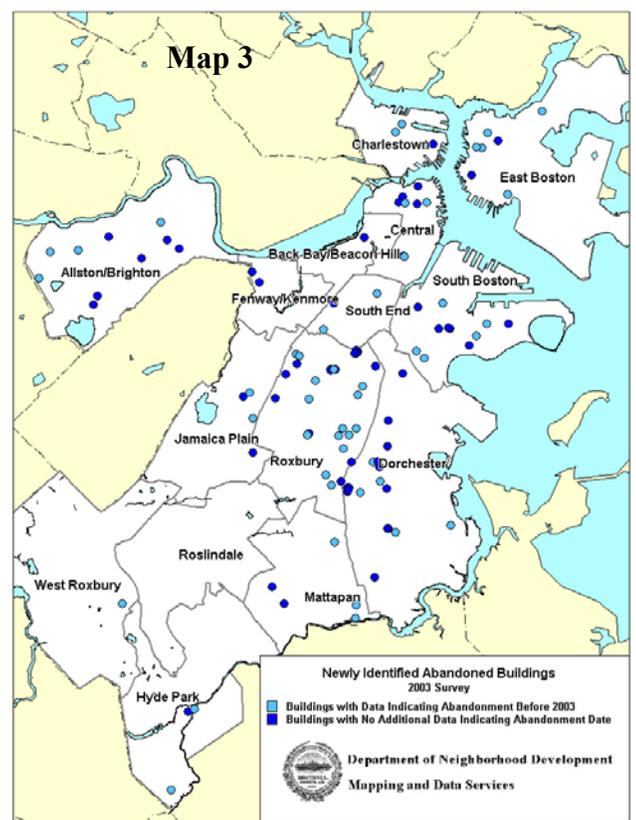
## Changes in the Inventory of Abandoned Buildings

Map 2 shows the 93 buildings from the 2002 survey that were found to be no longer abandoned in the 2003 survey.

- 77% (72) were residential buildings, indicating continued strength in the housing market.
- These 93 buildings were on the abandoned building list for an average of just less than four years.

Map 3 shows the 108 buildings that were *added* to the abandoned building list.

- 54% (58) of the newly identified buildings were residential.
- For 48% (52) of the buildings, data was available (tax title, water and sewer cut-offs, fire data, assessing data, etc.) that indicated that the buildings were abandoned before 2003.



## Survey Methodology

The abandoned building survey is based on information gathered in previous surveys and data on buildings that are likely to be abandoned.

In addition to re-surveying previously identified buildings, a street by street survey is completed for most of the city. This area includes 99% of the abandoned buildings identified from 1998 to 2002.

Data on abandonment from the Assessing Department and fire data from the Fire Department was used to enhance the street-by-street survey and to visit specific buildings outside of the street-by-street survey area.

A photo is taken of each property and a form is completed from a visual inspection of the exterior of the property for overall condition and rehab status.



# Residential Abandoned Buildings

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Chart 2

Residential Abandoned By Type, 1997

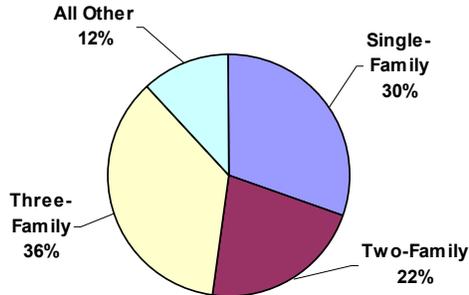
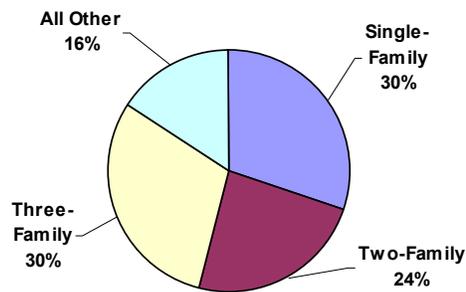


Chart 3

Residential Abandoned By Type, 2003



## Tax Status of Abandoned Residential Buildings

Charts 4 and 5 relate to the tax status of residential abandoned buildings.

From 1997 to 2003, the proportion of buildings that were publicly owned has remained constant. In other words, the number of publicly owned abandoned buildings has been reduced at the same rate as the reduction in all abandoned buildings.

The proportion of privately owned, tax current buildings has been reduced dramatically, while the number of privately owned abandoned buildings that owe taxes has increased to 30% of the abandoned residential buildings. This reflects that the buildings that remain are more likely to be the “difficult to develop” buildings.

## Residential Abandonment By Unit Type

Charts 2 and 3 show the proportion of residential abandoned buildings in each unit size category (single-family, two-family, etc.).

The proportion of buildings in each unit type category has remained relatively consistent from 1997 to 2003.

The decrease in the proportion of three-family homes was a change from 2002 to 2003, reflecting a pick-up in rehab activity of such properties.

Chart 4

Tax Status, 1997

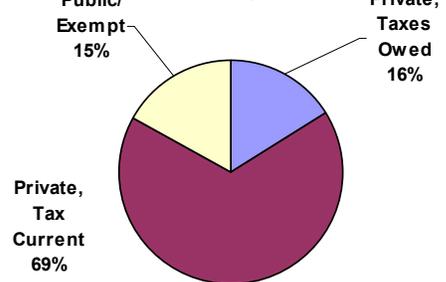
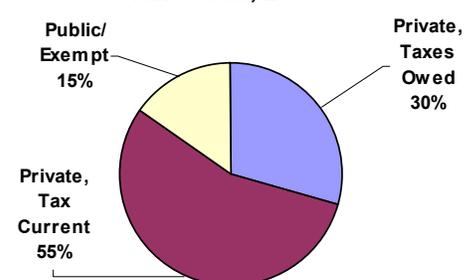


Chart 5

Tax Status, 2003





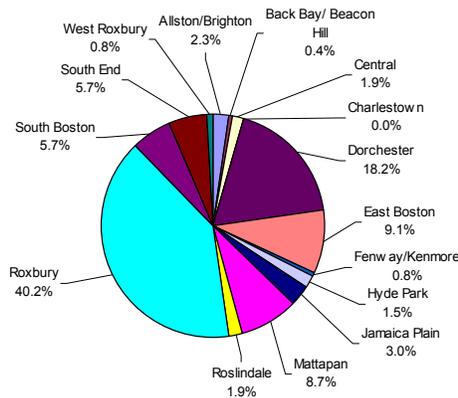
# Residential Abandoned Buildings

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Chart 6

2003 Residential Abandoned Buildings  
By Neighborhood



## Residential Abandoned Buildings By Neighborhood

From 1997 to 2003, there has been a 67% decrease in the number of abandoned residential buildings.

Combined, the neighborhoods of Roxbury, Dorchester, East Boston and Mattapan contain 76% of Boston's abandoned residential buildings.

Roxbury continues to have the largest number of residential abandoned buildings (106), but the number is down dramatically since the beginning of the survey in 1997 (-65%) and the number continues to drop, with a healthy 20% decrease in abandonment from 2002 to 2003.

Table 1: Residential Abandoned Buildings, By Neighborhood

Neighborhood	1997	2002	2003	Percent Change 1997 to 2003	Percent Change 2002 to 2003
Allston/Brighton	3	4	6	100%	50%
Back Bay/Beacon Hill	2	2	1	-50%	-50%
Central	14	4	5	-64%	25%
Charlestown	1	0	0	-100%	0%
Dorchester	166	54	48	-71%	-11%
East Boston	52	25	24	-54%	-4%
Fenway/Kenmore	1	1	2	100%	100%
Hyde Park	44	4	4	-91%	0%
Jamaica Plain	37	9	8	-78%	-11%
Mattapan	101	34	23	-77%	-32%
Roslindale	11	5	5	-55%	0%
Roxbury	306	132	106	-65%	-20%
South Boston	7	13	15	114%	15%
South End	47	16	15	-68%	-6%
West Roxbury	3	1	2	-33%	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>795</b>	<b>304</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>-67%</b>	<b>-13%</b>

While Dorchester has seen a large decrease in abandoned residential building since 1997 (-71%) the rate of decrease from 2002 to 2003 (-11%) was less than the citywide decrease of 13%.

Of those neighborhoods with a moderate to high number of abandoned residential buildings, Hyde Park has had the largest reduction (91%) in such buildings.

While East Boston has experienced a dramatic 54% decrease in abandonment since 1997, there is little movement in the remaining stock of abandoned residential buildings.

While the number of abandoned residential buildings *increased* from 1997 to 2003 in Allston/Brighton and Fenway/Kenmore, much of this can be attributed to the fact that with so few abandoned buildings, any change appears dramatic.

South Boston has also experienced an increase (114%) from 1997 to 2003. This increase may be due largely to more thorough surveying, but is worth more investigation.

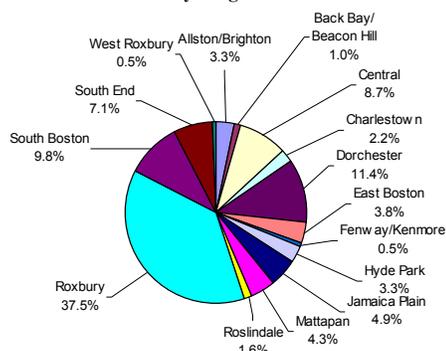


# Commercial Abandoned Buildings

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**Chart 7**  
2003 Commercial/Mixed-Use Abandoned Buildings  
By Neighborhood



## Commercial & Mixed-Use Abandoned Buildings By Neighborhood

From 1997 to 2003, there has been a 26% decrease in the number of abandoned commercial/mixed-use buildings. Not only is this a smaller decrease than the 67% decrease in residential abandoned buildings, there was a 5% increase in abandoned commercial buildings from 2002 to 2003.

The recent increase is linked to more thorough survey techniques as well as a real increase in the number of abandoned warehouse styled buildings. Though further investigation is required, this may be due to wider changes in the economy as certain building types become obsolete.

**Table 2:**  
Commercial & Mixed Use Abandoned Buildings, By Neighborhood

Neighborhood	1997	2002	2003	Percent Change 1997 to 2003	Percent Change 2002 to 2003
Allston/Brighton	5	2	6	20%	200%
Back Bay/Beacon Hill	1	2	2	100%	0%
Central	30	14	16	-47%	14%
Charlestown	0	3	4	N/A	33%
Dorchester	30	22	21	-30%	-5%
East Boston	30	9	7	-77%	-22%
Fenway/Kenmore	4	0	1	-75%	N/A
Hyde Park	13	5	6	-54%	20%
Jamaica Plain	15	8	9	-40%	13%
Mattapan	13	7	8	-39%	14%
Roslindale	5	3	3	-40%	0%
Roxbury	77	67	69	-10%	3%
South Boston	2	17	18	800%	6%
South End	22	15	13	-41%	-13%
West Roxbury	1	2	1	0%	-50%
<b>Total</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>-26%</b>	<b>5%</b>

South Boston has seen the most dramatic increase in abandonment (800%). Though some of this increase can be attributed to a more thorough survey, much of the increase is due to a rapid transition in the area adjacent to the Broadway subway stop. Old industrial and warehouse buildings are becoming obsolete, but new residential development has been on the increase.

Abandonment in Roxbury remains relatively stable, having fallen only 10% since 1997. While the residential market appears to be relatively strong in this area, there are still a significant number of difficult to develop commercial properties.

Of neighborhoods with a moderate number of abandoned commercial/mixed-use buildings, East Boston has seen the most significant drop (-77%) since 1997.

The South End defied recent trends with a decrease from 1997 to 2003 (-41%) and from 2002 to 2003 (-13%). The long term trend towards gentrification of this neighborhood has continued through the recent recession.



# Next Steps Abandoned Buildings

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## Abandoned Buildings: Next Steps & Potential Areas of Action

### Residential Abandonment:

- The number of newly identified abandoned buildings has fallen since last year, but the number of privately owned buildings under renovation has also fallen, indicating that those properties that remain are the “hard core” properties. A coordinated effort between the Department of Neighborhood Development, Inspectional Services and the Tax Title Division of the City Law Department, lead by a staff person dedicated to this project (much like the successful “Top Ten Drug Dens” program) could make a difference in these properties.
- Of the remaining residential abandoned buildings, 30% are tax delinquent. This would indicate that a specific push to foreclose on these buildings should be considered.
- Of the newly identified buildings, 18% were due to fire. From fieldwork, it has become apparent that it takes more than one year for a building to recover from a major fire, and that some buildings are never rehabbed, becoming a long-term abandoned property. In addition to the provision of new “fire recovery” services, we must ask if owners (both owner occupants and landlords) are adequately insured in case of a fire. If not, what can we do to assist homeowners secure adequate homeowners insurance?

### Commercial Abandonment

- The number of *identified* commercial abandoned buildings has increased 22% in the last two years. While the survey has been more thorough over the last two years and there are difficulties in judging the abandonment of some storage buildings, there *has been an overall increase* in the number of abandoned commercial buildings.
- In South Boston, these commercial buildings are in area of rapid change in which old commercial uses are no longer viable and new residential projects are being built. The prospects for re-use of the property may appear high, though some buildings may have structural or environmental issues that would limit re-use.
- In other neighborhoods, many of the commercial buildings are no longer economically viable and they should be assessed for demolition or adaptive re-use as residential properties. In some cases, there may be a viable commercial use for that location, but building/site conditions may be prohibitively expensive.

*Abandoned Building Trends* is published by the Policy Development & Research Division of the City of Boston Department of Neighborhood Development. For more information about this publication, call Tim Davis at (617) 635-0269 or e-mail [tdavis.dnd@ci.boston.ma.us](mailto:tdavis.dnd@ci.boston.ma.us)